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Yuri to be with us for a while: U.S. docs

By LARS-ERIK NELSON

Washington (News Bureau)—When Soviet President Yuri Andropov turned up looking pale and frail last week, the American intelligence community's "ghoul squad," a group of doctors trained to diagnose sickly foreign leaders from afar, sprang into action.

After peering at news films of Andropov's performance at a meeting with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, the spy doctors gave this prognosis on the 69-year-old former KGB chief: He has moderately serious heart and lung problems, but has a 90% chance of living out this year. Americans might as well get used to dealing with him for the foreseeable future.

Andropov, who replaced Leonid Brezhnev last December, has forcefully established himself as the Soviet Union's preeminent leader. In addition to replacing Brezhnev as general secretary of the Communist Party, Andropov also inherited Brezhnev's role as chairman of the Defense Council and, last month, became president.

BUT HIS APPARENT difficulty in walking, his unexplained absences and a tremor in his left hand have made his health a question mark, prompting some analysts, like former-national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski, to conclude that Andropov is only a temporary leader, soon to be replaced by healthier—but probably not younger—colleagues.

"The current regime is more transitional than any that has followed the death of a Soviet ruler," Brzezinski said last week. "It is more transitional than (Georgi) Malenkov after the death of Stalin. The man (Andropov) is clearly very ill. But all his associates are his own age, and they are not prepared to step aside for a younger generation. So whoever replaces Andropov would also be transitional. The Soviet Union is in for an unstable, uncertain period."

Brzezinski argues that this uncertainty requires the United States to be cautious in dealing with the Soviet Union. Its leadership, he says, is in no mood for dramatic or sweeping changes in the U.S.-Soviet relationship. Andropov might also not be well enough to entertain the thought of a possible summit meeting with President Reagan.

Former Ambassador to Moscow Malcolm Toon argues that it does not really matter who holds top

power in the Kremlin; it always behaves the same. Andropov's rule has not dramatically differed from the last years of Brezhnev, when many Russians and foreign analysts assumed dramatic innovations would occur as soon as the Old Man died.

ANDROPOV, THOUGH firmly in command, is like Brezhnev—no dictator. He must rely on

securing a consensus of his colleagues. He cannot simply give orders.

Government experts do not dispute that Andropov's death might touch off a prolonged and possibly paralyzing struggle for power. But they say the evidence does not suggest that his health is in imminent danger.

"He does not have serious kidney ailments, Alzheimer's disease (senility), Parkinson's disease or Hodgkin's disease," one expert said, dismissing virtually all the long-range diagnoses made of Andropov during the week. "He has a cardiovascular problem serious enough to require occasional bed rest."

This expert challenged reports from the West German delegation that Andropov was forced to miss Kohl's arrival because he was undergoing kidney dialysis. "There is no known disease that can be treated by a one-shot dialysis," he said. "If you need dialysis at all, you need it two or three times a week. And he has shown no sign of that."

AS FOR REPORTS that the tremor in Andropov's left hand indicated serious illness, the expert said, "If he had a serious enough illness to cause his hand to shake, it would shake when it was at rest. We saw his hand at rest. It didn't tremble."

Further, political analysts of Soviet affairs voiced strong doubts that Andropov's Politburo colleagues would have entrusted him with supreme power if he were known to be seriously ill.

If the medical experts are wrong and Andropov dies soon or becomes incapacitated, his successor is almost certain to come from his own age group in the Politburo. "The Kremlin is still a gerontocracy," one analyst said. "It is not about to move down to the younger generation."

Brzezinski predicts that Andropov's likeliest successor would be Defense Minister Dmitry Ustinov—or even Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Grigori Romanov, Leningrad Party leader, is a perennial long-shot.

Toon predicts a "troika" formed of Brezhnev's former crony Konstantin Chernenko, Romanov and Mikhail Gorbachev, an agricultural specialist.

A U.S. intelligence analyst says Ustinov, with his military background, and Gromyko, who has concentrated on foreign affairs, are both too narrowly focused for top power. His guess is trade union leader Viktor Grishin. But Andropov, he